



Kumusha and masalads: (inter)generational foodways and urban food security in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Understandings of urban foodways in Zimbabwe and other African countries have been dominated by food security frameworks. The focus on material scarcity and measurable health outcomes within these frameworks has often obscured the socio-cultural dimension of foodways and the historical and political structures that have shaped, and continue to shape, everyday relationships with food among different groups of urban residents in cities. Addressing these often-overlooked aspects, this paper looks at intergenerational contestations over foodways in a mid-sized high-density Zimbabwean town. Presenting results of 6-months ethnographic fieldwork involving participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the paper explores meanings and practices of food in a postcolonial urban setting using three generational groups as a point of departure. These groups are youth (aged 15 to 25 years old), a post-independence generation (aged 26 to 43) and a pre-independence middle-aged generation (aged 43 to 65). Findings show that foodways of the three generations, each having experienced Zimbabwe's (post-)colonial political economy in different ways, are negotiated through postcolonial socio-ecological relations, urban–rural connections and social hierarchies articulated through urban and rural space. The paper concludes that to understand urban food security in a postcolonial setting, urbanites' generation-specific life experiences and intergenerational negotiations around historically situated spatial and socio-ecological relations should be considered. The findings could inform urban food security policy to make it more targeted towards the needs of different generational groups as well as more attuned to urbanites' dynamic socio-cultural foodways and the socio-ecological relations that shape these.

Keywords Urban food security · Food sovereignty · Foodways · Generation · Zimbabwe

Introduction

Zimbabwe as a case study of urban foodways provokes important questions about how urban residents relate to food in a context of economic and political instability. Foodways encompass the social and cultural meanings, practices, processes and contexts in the conceptualization, production, sourcing, preparation and consumption of food (Anderson 1971; Alkon et al. 2013; Cannuscio et al. 2010). Raftopoulos (2016, par. 16) wrote in 2016 that “Living in and through crisis has become the modality through which Zimbabwean politics has come to be practiced and imbibed in daily lived experience”. Considering these economically adverse

circumstances, most studies on urban foodways in Zimbabwe (and southern Africa at large) have investigated the extent to which urban residents have access to enough, nutritious and safe food, using the concept of food security. The dominant food security paradigm of looking at food behaviors in the African city is predominantly based on universal quantitative measures across different socio-economic and geographical settings (Burchi and De Muro 2016; Ghuha-Khasnobis et al. 2007; Santeramo 2015; McCordic and Frayne 2017). For example, in southern Africa, most studies on food in the city have investigated the relationship between neighborhood and socio-economic household characteristics on one hand, and dietary diversity scales, food accessibility assessments and months of adequate food provisioning ratings on the other (Crush and Caesar 2014; Crush and Frayne 2009; Even-Zahav and Kelly 2016; Tawodzera 2011; Roos et al. 2013; Riley and Caesar 2018; Riley and Legwegoh 2014).

Yet, even when people's material relationships to food are crucial in living with, and adapting to, economic and

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political crisis, social and cultural relationships are equally central to how people relate to food in an African city. A reason for this blind spot could be found in the persistent crisis narrative and international discourse that stresses chronic crisis, scarcity and material and cultural loss in Africa, which obscures complex agricultural- and food related histories (Freidberg 2003; Mandala 2003) and people's various mundane, creative and spontaneous relationships with food and African urban life forms (Pieterse 2010; Myers 2011).

Scholars in the interdisciplinary field of critical nutrition have critiqued the food security framework for viewing food as a universal and apolitical commodity void of social and cultural meaning (Hayes-Conroy et al. 2014; Scrinis 2008; Yates-Doerr 2012). Similarly, using food justice and food sovereignty frameworks, scholars examining indigenous foodways have drawn attention to the importance of understanding people's social, moral, spiritual, political, ecological and embodied relationships with food (Fazzino and Loring 2013; Mares and Peña 2011; McCutcheon 2011; Norgaard et al. 2011; Power 2008; Wilson 2016).

Additionally, food security has been critiqued for not engaging with wider economic and political structural factors that determine everyday experiences of food (Guthman 2014; Dixon 2016). Hayes-Conroy and Sweet (2015) argue that dominant food security approaches make understandings of food insecurity in households seem static and standardized, obscuring complex social, political, embodied and emotional dynamics involved in daily food encounters. Emphasizing equity in decision-making processes and distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges in the food system (Cadieux and Slocum 2015), food sovereignty and food justice approaches similarly recognize that food security should not be understood in isolation from structural political processes, such as national and international neoliberal policies and corporate consolidation in the global agro-food system (Alkon and Mares 2012).

With a few exceptions (Hovorka 2012; Riley and Dodson 2016), these critiques on the absence of socio-cultural and structural factors in food security studies have, however, not yet left a considerable mark in studies on urban foodways in African countries, which remains dominated by a material food security lens (Battersby and Watson 2019; Blekking et al. 2020; Giller 2020). Challenging this emphasis on material scarcity and building upon food security critiques, this paper uncovers the meanings and practices of food among three generational groups in a high-density town in Zimbabwe, which cannot be named to protect research participants.

Generation is defined as individuals passing through their life stages in a similar historical and cultural environment (Biggs 2007). Instead of basing generations on Western categories such as 'baby boomer', often used in commercial consumption research, the three generations included

in this research are based on different historical periods in Zimbabwe (Raftopoulos and Mlambo 2009). This paper considers the perspectives of youth aged 18 to 25 years old (in 2017), who started primary school in a crisis ridden Zimbabwe after 1998. The second generational group is a post-independence (or 'born free') generation aged 26 to 43, who started primary school after independence in 1980. The last group concerns a post-independence middle-aged generation (44 to 65 years old) who started primary school after WWII in the self-governing British colony of Southern Rhodesia and Ian Smith's independent state of Rhodesia and the liberation war that followed. Instead of basing generations on birth dates, the starting age of primary school (6 years) has been chosen, assuming that one forms more robust and long-lasting memories from that age onwards (Bouyeure and Noulhiane 2020). Unfortunately, elderly participants above 70 years old are not included in this research due to limited access.

However, it is widely accepted among social scientists that generational categories are socially constructed and contested, as any one generation is multifaceted with different experiences and views based on other social characteristics such as gender, race and social class (Scott 2014). This, for example, particularly applies to youth as a generational category in African countries, which is shaped by relations of power, hierarchical family structures, expectations and responsibilities, such as marriage, and political identities (De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Oosterom and Psarayi 2014; Ukeje and Iwilade 2012). Taking this into account, I consider that generation is a fluid category that intersects with other personal identities and characteristics, such as personal place-based histories (rural or urban residence), in the discussion of the findings. Nevertheless, it would have been beneficial to ask participants with which of the three generations they identify, if at all.

Even though in this paper generations have been conceptualized based on periods in Zimbabwe's history, this study presents broad trends based on these generational categories that inductively emerged from my fieldwork. The categories still prove to be a useful tool to gain insight into differences in foodways of different social groups.

Socio-cultural conceptualisations of food in urban Africa

The most widely used definition of food security incorporates the social and cultural nature of foodways through the notion of 'food preferences':

Food security exists when all people at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs

and *food preferences* [emphasis added] for an active and healthy life (FAO et al. 2013, p. 17).

The term food preferences has mostly been used as an option in quantitative food security questionnaires in Africa (Frayne et al. 2018) or in economically driven consumer surveys (Bell et al. 2020), which risks reducing food to a culturally suitable nutrient commodity. It also risks obscuring the multifarious social, cultural, political and ecological relationships people have with food and food systems (Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy 2015).

The food sovereignty framework acknowledges socio-cultural foodways more strongly in its definition and approach by centering the term culturally appropriate food. Moreover, alongside decision making over food systems, culturally appropriate food is claimed as a right, as can be recognized from this definition:

Food sovereignty is the right of all peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (La Vía Campesina 2009).

Even though the above food security definition is still most prominent in policy discourses (FAO et al. 2021), food security definitions are evolving and converging with food sovereignty (Clapp et al. 2022). In the updated vision on food security by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE 2020), socio-cultural foodways are better accommodated through two extra pillars. The first of the two new pillars, agency, is understood as:

the capacity of individuals or groups *to make their own decisions about what foods they eat, what foods they produce, how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems* [emphasis added], and their ability to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance (HLPE 2020, p. 9).

As the food sovereignty framework has long recognized, the addition of the role of personal and communal decision-making over food consumption and over the food system gives more leeway for incorporating nuanced and complex socio-cultural foodways. After all, as Sampson and Wills (2013) also argue, working towards making the food system your own, is, among other things, socially and culturally defined, and continually re-defined in historical and political asymmetrical power relations.

Underlying social processes that shape food security, and the interrelations with economic and environmental factors, are also acknowledged in the second sustainability pillar:

Sustainability refers to the long-term ability of food systems to provide food security and nutrition *in a way that does not compromise* the economic, social

and environmental *bases* [emphases added] that generate food security and nutrition for future generations (HLPE 2020, p. 9).

Recent discussions on the updated six pillar food security definition are mostly focused on old and new indicators and measurements (Clapp et al. 2022; Servin and Moseley 2022). While crucial for policy making, adding experiential understandings through qualitative methods in policy debates would add an in-depth understanding of contradictory and complex everyday food relationships that are also crucial to food security.

Despite the emphasis on the materialities and measurements of urban food security, several qualitative studies on socio-cultural foodways focusing on the African continent have demonstrated that foodways are the result of complex social, cultural and political factors on personal and structural levels. Besides studies in rural Africa (Ohna et al. 2012; Mango and Hebinck 2004; Noack and Pauw 2015), anthropologists and human geographers have demonstrated that patterns of food consumption in urban Africa cannot be attributed to purchasing power and resource access alone. Food is equally intertwined with people's identities and socio-cultural values and practices. Abrahams (2007), for example, highlights cultural and religious modes of consumption in Johannesburg. Based on participatory group discussions in Malawi's capital Blantyre, Riley and Dodson (2016) argue that while diets are certainly shaped by economic factors and ecological capacities, they are equally intricately bound up with spatial, gendered and generational identities.

Another strand of socio-cultural qualitative research on food in African cities highlights people's agency in creating, maintaining and adjusting rich, hybrid culinary cultures based on past, and in the face of current, societal changes and influences. Freidberg (2003) and Koenig (2006) in respectively urban Burkina Faso and Mali show how dietary norms and practices consist of an amalgamation of historical spatial and ecological influences. Both scholars argue that the countries' cuisines can be seen as hybrid. Hybrid refers to the ways in which 'local' and 'traditional' foodways are always subject to a process of transformation, based on historical and contemporary political and economic processes, such as experiences of colonialism and national and global (neoliberal) agro-food policies.

Legwegoh and Hovorka (2016) and Clark (2014) also demonstrate that foodways are dynamic and hybrid by countering the artificial and binary categorization of 'traditional' and 'modern' diets. They show that urban residents in Gaborone engage in a constant process of appropriating aspects of diverse food cultures to form their own. Yet, in studying conceptions of 'modern' food in the city of Cotonou in Benin, Elwert-Kretschmer (2001) challenges the idea of a

common urban hybrid cuisine. She points out that culinary integration takes place in different degrees and in different ways, depending on gender, age and class. Similar dynamics around the role of agency in culinary practices have been observed in anthropological studies elsewhere in the Global South (Solomon 2016; Yates-Doerr 2012; McLennan et al. 2018; Wilson 2013, 2014; Wilk 1999; Hayes-Conroy and Sweet 2015).

Context and methodology

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the context of a tumultuous country amid an economic meltdown and palpable political instability in 2016 and the beginning of 2017, six months before ex-president Robert Mugabe gave in to the pressures of a military coup. Most Zimbabweans felt they were on the brink of a repetition of the 2008 crisis. In 2008, the country experienced what turned out to be its worst economic crisis, following years of public sector negligence, authoritarian rule, political patronage, corruption and coercion as well as economic mismanagement that culminated into political violence and social and economic despair. Annual inflation was hovering at 231 million per cent and Zimbabwe's external debt stood at six billion US dollars (McGreal 2008). For urban residents, this meant that basic amenities, healthcare, electricity, water, housing, transport and food outlets became even more inaccessible, economically and physically (Potts 2011). In addition, a steep decline in food production and a hiatus in (formal) food imports contributed to a surge in food poverty in urban areas, with disastrous consequences for people's wellbeing (Tawodzera 2011). Life for most urban residents became even more characterized by what is referred to as *kukiya-kiya* in local parlance. *Kukiya-kiya* constitutes multiple forms of 'making do' in an informal economy of 'getting by', from vegetable vending to illegal foreign currency trading to bribe-taking and pilfering at work (Jones 2010). This prolonged crisis of political instability, bad governance and socio-economic decline particularly affected young people, as they remained in a constant state of suspension and 'waithood' (Honwana 2012) and faced rising levels of illicit substance abuse (Mukwenha et al 2021).

Participant observation and qualitative interviews

Against this background, I carried out ethnographic participant observation and qualitative interviews in 2016 and 2017 during a total period of six months while living with my in-laws. The ethnographic fieldwork offered a suitable methodology to study foodways and their generational specificities, commonalities and negotiations, because it allowed me to, in-situ, uncover everyday relationships to food as well

as social meanings and constructions surrounding food. According to Gold's (1958) categorization of the roles that a participant observer can adjust to, I was a participant-as-observer. In this role, a researcher participates in people's lives and engages in regular interaction, which resonates to what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1998) has called 'deep hanging out'.

Yet, due to the private nature of living in a household, my 'hanging out' was partial in the sense that it mainly focused on food related activities (see ethical considerations). I participated in and observed the daily food-related activities of different household members (cooking, shopping, eating, cleaning, gardening, etc.). I also had informal conversations with household members and visiting family, neighbours and friends about these activities as well as food related values, imaginaries and histories. While not providing many details due to anonymity reasons, the household changed in composition a few times during my stay, but comprised of nine people in total—with four people from the youth generation, two from the post-independence generation and three from the middle aged generation growing up during colonialism.

Starting with family friends and neighbors, based on snowball sampling, I conducted 31 semi-structured interviews of 45 min to an hour, most of which were 'mobile' (Ross et al. 2009) or 'go-along' interviews (Kusenbach 2003; Wiederhold 2015). This meant that my research assistant and I accompanied participants in activities and journeys that were associated with acquiring, preparing and eating food. Making a small journey or undertaking an activity with the participants created rapport and facilitated dynamic conversations, because participants were in charge of the activity. The activity also provided immediate and material prompts to talk about. The sample existed of fifteen participants identifying as a man and sixteen as a woman. Seven participants were part of the youth generation, fourteen were part of the post-independence generation and ten were part of the middle-aged generation. All participants, except four, who lived in a high-density neighborhood of a bigger city, resided in the town where I was based.

While most of my observations and interviews are based on fieldwork in Zimbabwe, some findings in this paper are based on 26 (non-mobile) interviews of 30 to 40 min, conducted with Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, who before migrating had lived in the town of my family or other high-density urban areas in Zimbabwe. Due to practical issues, I had to unexpectedly shift a minor part of my research to South Africa. My research assistant and I mainly interviewed Zimbabweans working in the service industry in three different neighbourhoods in Johannesburg. The sample comprised of ten participants who identified as a woman and sixteen as a man. Six participants were of the youth generation, twelve of the post-independence generation and eight of the middle-aged generation.

All in all, in terms of the diversity of participants, I interviewed more participants of the post-independence and middle-aged generation. Due to limitations in access to the young generation, I could have interviewed more young people to have a more balanced amount of participants per age group. However, I still had intensive interactions with the younger generation, as the household I conducted the participant observation in comprised of four young people. After transcribing my notes and interview recordings in NVivo, I analyzed all data by means of a thematic analysis, which involved systematically organizing the data by creating recurring core and sub-themes (Bryman 2012).

Ethical considerations

This study has received ethical clearance by the School of Geosciences Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh. All names of participants are pseudonyms and possible identifying information, including the name of the town this study was conducted in, have been removed. All participants in this study gave informed consent for their participation.

As family life and the home are private spheres, it was crucial that, before my stay with my family in law, I established a safe, trustworthy and honest research environment. Prior to my stay, I had several conversations with not only Baba (father) and Amai (mother), the decision makers in the household, but all members of the household to talk about the purpose of my research and what participation would entail. We talked about what I would be observing (food-related behaviors and routines such as cooking and shopping trips), what I would be asking about (food preferences, views on different types of foods) and what not (private matters, such as health issues and family politics). We also discussed how I would record these observations and conversations (overt observation, no audio recordings and only written notes in my notebook that they were able to consult at all times) and who safeguarded these (myself). I, furthermore, explained how the data would be used (solely in academic publications and presentations) and presented (analysis by myself and anonymized quotes and descriptions with pseudonyms for names and the rural homeland). I also emphasized the option and their right to inform me of what not to write about and their right to withdraw from participating in my research without any offense taken or other consequences. We also discussed practical matters, such as how I would communicate about my schedule and how I would contribute to household chores, expenses and help with homework. All nine household members (who lived in the house during different periods of time) gave informed consent to participate in the research.

For accountability and transparency towards the household members as well as various passing visitors, I adopted

an overt research role with overt research behaviours, like other scholars who have conducted ethnographic ‘intimate insider’ research (Strudwick 2018; Taylor 2011). Household members saw me writing in my notebook, mostly during food-related instances. In a non-food related context, I would tell them what I was writing down. I also purposefully mentioned my research in conversations or when engaged in a food related task together. Additionally, I regularly asked them for feedback on my observations.

Visitors, close neighbours, acquaintances and family members, knew the reason for my stay, but I only included their presence and interactions in my notes after I told them about my research and asked whether I could write down our often informal conversations around food. Almost all visitors agreed and were keen to engage in a conversation about their foodways and Zimbabwean food culture. I asked many of them if they wanted to participate in the semi-structured audio recorded ‘mobile interviews’ (see below). I became known in the neighbourhood and in the family’s social circle as the *muroora* [daughter in law] who came to visit to write a book about Zimbabwean food.

Despite my proactive attempts to present myself as a researcher, this shows that I inevitably had a personal and a professional role. It meant that, even though I adopted several overt research behaviours, I had to be extra vigilant for things that were said ‘on’ or ‘off’ the record (Taylor 2011). If in doubt, I would always ask if they agreed that I would write something down. Furthermore, due to histories of colonialism, development and globalization and me being a white, European, highly educated, middle class woman associated with a Scottish university, power imbalances in interviews were sometimes clear as it was at times observable that participants felt they needed to provide the most desirable or knowledgeable answer.

The interviews in Zimbabwe and South Africa were audio recorded, except with two participants who only consented to note taking. Even though I had prepared informed consent forms and information sheets, it was decided that informed consent was obtained from participants by means of a spoken statement, after verbal explanation of data usage and access options, the guarantee of anonymity and participants’ right to withdraw participation (similar as explained above). My research assistant Tapiwa (pseudonym), who was present at all interviews and is fluent in native Shona and Ndebele languages, and I noticed that signing a document in an authoritarian context that is fraught by a culture of fear (Koch 2013) was not a suitable option for participants in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, the same applied, but with the additional concern of participants’ possible precarious immigration status. Tapiwa, gave his and my own contact details in case participants had any questions, concerns or wanted to be sent a summary of the results.

Findings

This section chronicles different everyday food practices and meanings based on historically situated socio-ecological relations, spatial connections to urban and rural spaces and the influence of Zimbabwe's post-independence political economy. Central to participants' foodways were negotiations around the notion of traditional food, a category of foods built upon connections to *kumusha*, the ancestral rural homeland, and an appreciation of food grown within immediate socio-ecological systems. Besides a physical place, *kumusha* is social and cultural place fundamental to the worldview and ways of living of indigenous Zimbabweans (Sibanda 2014), as will be further elaborated in the findings section.

The findings are presented per generation to indicate main trends in the findings. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the divide between food preferences per generation is not always as clear cut and straightforward. In the discussion and conclusion, I place the findings in relation to urban food security, food sovereignty and hybrid socio-cultural conceptualizations of food in urban Africa.

Rural–urban and socio-ecological connections among the post-independence and middle-aged generations

The findings indicate that most participants from the post-independence generation (aged 26 to 43) as well as the middle-aged generation (between 44 and 65 years) preferred food grown in harmony with local ecosystems, which encompassed food that was high in fiber, subject to minimal processing and did not contain artificial flavorings or preservatives. The food that they classified as 'good food' was described with the words 'traditional, simple, pure, natural, organic, raw and real' (interviews and fieldnotes, 2016–2017). Legumes, pulses, tubers, indigenous grains, such as sorghum, wild fruits and vegetables, crops cultivated with manure and crop rotation and animal products from free-ranging or wild animals were mentioned as examples of this type of food. I use the term traditional to refer to this body of foods, a word used by most participants and that implies that this type of food is rooted in historical cultural experience on an intimate scale.

The idea that natural processes in one's vicinity produce good food came to the fore when my brother-in-law Jeff (who was in his mid-thirties) and I were instructed to place buckets outside under the rim of the roof gutter to collect rainwater, as the formal water supply in the town was erratic.

Jeff said, referring to my earlier questions that day about what he thinks makes good food:

This water (holds hand in the rain), you see, right now it's raining. It's not the same water as if we fetch it from tap. That is treated water, but this one is real, direct to the plants. That's how God made everything to be (gestures at the vegetable plants and trees in garden). He gives water right here, right now, to give us the most perfect food (fieldnotes, December 2016).

While we were cleaning and peeling potatoes for mashed potatoes during lunch, Jeff's wife Katie also referred to the connection between nature and 'good food'. She explained the quality of the potatoes by means of the soil:

"Ours (potatoes) are the originals. Our soil is red. You see (gesturing at the brown/red water). It has all the nutrients, that's why everything tastes rich. Food doesn't need much—just our nature. It's not that difficult. It's just natural". She compared the potatoes to what she experienced in South Africa, when she temporarily lived there to find work. "In South Africa, the soil is different. It is white, like salt. The potatoes taste 'mm, mm'", she said disapprovingly while shaking her head from side to side (fieldnotes, December 2016).

In the same way that Jeff makes a connection between the rainwater and good food, Katie also links 'our' potatoes, 'our' soil and 'our' nature to the food that she prefers. They both establish that food produced in harmony with 'Zimbabwean' socio-ecological systems constitutes the best type of food.

As the following excerpt from my fieldnotes attests to, the sourcing of vegetables for dinner was another daily food practice during which it became clear that in order to obtain the vegetables that the family preferred, their production should occur in harmony with ecological processes. The excerpt also shows that this is a process that originates in *kumusha*.

Amai (the mother of the household) and Precious (a neighbor in her early twenties) asked me to buy *covo*, the green leafy vegetable used for relish, on my grocery round in the town. They both agreed they had to give me specific instructions, because Precious doubted if I had the skills to recognize the right bunch of *covo*.

Precious, a young woman who I came to know as very knowledgeable and passionate about traditional cuisine, told me that she knew very well how to recognize good quality vegetables, a skill she learnt from her grandmother in *kumusha*. She always compared different vendors. Amai chimed in and said to me: "You should not go to that vendor on the cor-

ner like last week. They were sour”, she said disapprovingly. Precious: “Just like the ones from Tilda (the neighbor). That’s how you know people use too much fertilizer”.

Amai replied: “The vegetable is best when you let it grow naturally. When it matures on its time, not like to help it to mature and all”. Precious agreed wholeheartedly: “Ehe! To get the original vegetable and the original taste, just use water and sometimes manure. Fertilizer makes it grow fast. Manure makes it grow strong”.

“To have nice and healthy food”, Amai responded, “you have to give it time to grow until it is ready. Then you say: Ah! Now the veg are OK, the chickens are OK, now you can eat”. (fieldnotes, August 2016)

The description of how one should grow vegetables reflects a certain attitude towards food production: one needs to have patience, to pay nature respect and to not interfere with its processes. Only then does food taste pure and like nature. As Precious refers to her grandmother in *kumusha*, this attitude is linked to socio-ecological systems in *kumusha*.

A group interview with hairdresser Tatenda and customers (all between 40 and 60 years old) at her salon exemplifies the idea that socio-cultural attachments and idealized ways of being and living in *kumusha* facilitate the provision of good, traditional food. The conversation was dominated by reminiscing about the connection of certain cultural lifestyles to food production in *kumusha*, which was prompted by an indigenous wild dried fruit, *matohwe*, also referred to as African chewing gum. I brought a few *matohwe* for Tatenda, which everyone shared during our interview. The following conversation ensued.

“Would anyone like some?” I asked while passing the *matohwe* around when I explained what my research was about.

“Have you ever eaten this one yourself?” Tatenda asked me.

“Matohwe”, I replied, “Yes, of course! I love it – it tastes like figs!” Everyone laughed.

Tatenda’s customer commented: “Ehe! It’s our chewing gum. We used to eat in the bush. When herding cattle, you just take this one, and you spend whole day (without eating anything else)”.

After nodding vehemently to show her agreement, Majory, another hairdresser chimed in: “The kind of state of living is different (in the village). When you are in villages, you find this kind of fruits. You need villages to understand what is better food”.

Tatenda’s customer then said: “Exactly! Life is just *mbichana*, *mbichana* (slow, slow). You plough, you plant so and so with manure, you cook on fire”. (interview with Tatenda, 3 February 2017).

This conversation at the hairdresser reveals that these participants of the middle aged generation link traditional food to *kumusha* because of their firsthand experiences in *kumusha*. Many grew up in *kumusha* or in between the city and *kumusha*, often living with grandparents while parents worked in the city. Because of these place-based experiences, they felt the responsibility to preserve culinary heritage that originated in *kumusha*. The following comment by Baba, the father of the household exemplifies this.

When he found out one of his friends bought a commercial brand of maize meal, Pearlenta, instead of growing maize in *kumusha*, he said:

If you have *kumusha*, and if you are not busy planting in this season, it shows your life is not really in order ... how can I say ... that you do not take your culture seriously. (fieldnotes, November 2016)

This comment also reveals the recurring theme of regret around the growing disconnection that the younger generation had to *kumusha*, who did not spend extended periods in *kumusha* anymore. Parents wanted their children to be taught values and a disposition related to ways of living in *kumusha*, such as discipline, responsibility, respect for elders, nature, the land and the family’s cultural and culinary heritage. This also applied, albeit to a lesser extent, to the born free generation, who lived some periods with their grandparents in *kumusha*, or at least spent their youth in the two decades after independence working in the fields or herding cattle in *kumusha* during the school breaks.

This type of mobility of children and youth is crucial to the economic strategies of urban households, which are in fact multi-spatial. It is common for Zimbabwean household to have a circular spatial presence, as people have sought to protect themselves by diversifying their economic activities in different geographic and economic places in the face of changing land rights due to land reform, social turbulence arising from state interventions and political and economic instability, climate change-induced severe weather events and mining industry dynamics (ICED 2017; Mbiba 2017). Yet, the spatial connections to *kumusha* in foodways that the above findings reveal, are not only material, but also social and cultural in nature. The land in *kumusha* plays a significant role because it carries history, and for indigenous Zimbabweans, their ancestral lineage. Life comes from, thrives on and ends in the land according to Shona cosmology. This is, for example, reflected in the idiom of *mwana wevhu*, which refers to indigenous Zimbabweans and their ancestors and means ‘children of the soil’ (Chavunduka

and Bromley 2013). According to the Zimbabwean *hunhu* or *ubuntu* worldview an individual's existence is interconnected with that of the community and the environment in which they live or come from (Sibanda 2014). With this in mind, *kumusha* is a place that represents past and present foodways, culinary traditions and ways of living.

While my findings showed that traditional food was mostly linked to, and promoted by, the middle-aged generation, people like Katie and Jeff (newlyweds in their late 20 s and 30 s), also demonstrated positive attitudes towards traditional food. Yet, as opposed to most people older than fifty, they simultaneously felt attracted to processed, industrially produced foods, associated with urban spaces, as I further explain below. My findings also show exceptions to the trend that traditional foods are preferred by the middle-aged generation, as the enthusiasm for traditional and natural food of Patience, a young woman who before becoming an urban resident lived in a rural area, demonstrated that, beyond generation, other social characteristics, such as experiences of rural living and associated foodways, can also explain preferences for and loyalty to certain foodways.

The post-independence generation: straddling in between rural/traditional and urban/modern spheres

A main finding from the interviews and participant observation was that while the majority of participants of the post-independence generation were attached to traditional food, they were equally drawn to industrially processed foods that were perceived as foreign and modern, like the fast-food restaurant Chicken Inn. For example, while we were in this popular Chicken Inn fast-food restaurant, Tapiwa, a gentleman in his end thirties, said about the other customers, who were mainly of his generation:

The thing is ... they say they want to eat roadrunner because it is the best, while they are sitting in Chicken Inn, devouring a chicken wing. (fieldnotes, January 2017)

Here Tapiwa highlighted the simultaneous presence of traditional and modern foods in urbanites' lives, which seemed hard to reconcile. The roadrunner chicken, referring to a chicken that runs on the road and eats whatever it finds, was an often-cited symbol of ways of being, knowing and living on ancestral land in *kumusha*. Chicken Inn, where one could carefully select a fried chicken meal deal, represented a celebration of individualism and a certain feeling of freedom to choose what to eat. The orderly and predictable restaurants, brightly lit, plastered with logos, slogans and pictures of smiling faces enjoying food, represented hope and modernity, a departure of his daily life that was filled

with a mental load, physical stress that urban residents of a low socio-economic standing bear in Zimbabwe.

Besides Chicken Inn providing a form of escapism from daily hardships, the fast-food restaurants, their brands and products, also represented a desired identity, social status and prestige, partly due to their 'foreign' appeal and partly due to the higher cost. This became particularly clear when Tapiwa told me that especially women like to be taken out to Chicken Inn. This act represented that he was someone of particular social and economic standing. He told me:

Especially women want Chicken Inn. If you make it at home (chips and chicken) ... No, it's not the same. (...) You have to come here. It gives you respect. You can't bring a girl to where we went yesterday (the locally-owned restaurant where we had a plate of sadza for lunch). That's just poor. Ah! She'll walk away! (fieldnotes, 13 January 2017).

Asking a woman to Chicken Inn demonstrated that you, besides being modern, fulfilled your gender-specific role as a provider. The modern setting of Chicken Inn was perceived as elevated from locally owned street restaurants and was used to portray an image or identity of a higher social standing towards others.

The interactions with Tapiwa around traditional foods and fast-food restaurants like Chicken Inn demonstrate a balancing act in between traditional food from *kumusha* and modern food from Chicken Inn. He liked food from *kumusha* because it affirmed his Zimbabwean identity. It provided a sense of self, dignity and representation of his cultural and culinary heritage. He loved fast food because it facilitated alternative reality in the face of daily experiences of structural violence and a temporary different social status.

Structural violence refers to the systematic ways in which social structures constrain individuals' choices and behavior and thereby physically harm or otherwise disadvantage (Farmer 2004; Wilson and McLennan 2019). The various forms of structural violence that most of my participants had to deal with can be understood in relation to a deeply unequal society, of which the foundations were laid during colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009), and a political economy of authoritarianism and patronage economies in the postcolonial period (Alexander and McGregor 2013; Magure 2012).

The expression of identity and attainment of an elevated social status through consumption of foreign and modern commodities and experiences in a postcolonial society can be linked to social hierarchies and value systems instituted and expressed during colonialism, as Western culture and its commodities gained a superior status within a colonial order (Miller 1994; Wilk 1999; Wilson 2013). These social hierarchies were, among other ways, instituted through socio-ecological systems. A racial spatial and environmental

ordering (or environmental formation, as Sundberg (2008) calls the combination of colonial racialized natural resource allocation, environmental imaginaries and political economies) created a social and culinary hierarchy, in which food consumed in white urban spaces (imported Western food) and food produced through what was established as a white form of agriculture involving large-scale, techno-scientific industrial agriculture was the most desirable (Wolmer and Scoones 2000).

Furthermore, the colonial administration exerted control over early urban laborer's diets and later urban households' diets through the food rations they received from employers (Mosley 1987). Laborers and their families purposefully did not receive Western foods (white bread, tinned food and other processed foods) to keep intact a culinary hierarchy in which Western food was a marker of cultural supremacy (Makombe 2013).

In the post-independence era, this engrained culinary hierarchy did not suddenly cease to exist. Western food products were still associated with a political and economic elite, albeit this elite now consisted of Black Zimbabweans. Despite efforts to redistribute wealth after independence and during land reform, because of ZANU–PF's claims to political and economic power, at its core Zimbabwe remained an unequal society in which the elite was not distinguished anymore by their skin color, but by their political connections to the ruling party and liberation war veterans (Muzondidya 2009; Raftopoulos 2009). Western foodways still represented a high social status and offered one of many avenues for the elite to exhibit their political and economic standing (Makombe 2013).

The youthful generation: urban *masalads*

A recurring trend in conversations with young participants in my research, who were between the ages of 18 and 25, were enthralled by what they perceived were foreign and modern foods, as they represented novelty, trends and the future. At the same time, young participants mostly shunned natural foods from *kumusha*. While the encounters that I describe below reveal that they value food from the rural sphere as negative and food from urban environments as positive, there were a few exceptions. A professional young chef returning from his studies in South Africa told me about his mission to combine different types of food, thereby challenging the binary of 'bad' rural food and 'good' urban food. Besides, a few young people like Patience who had lived with and learned from elderly relatives about traditional foodways in *kumusha* were proud of their culinary heritage and could not live without it.

Most of the younger participants associated the socio-ecological imaginaries of traditional food from *kumusha* with scarcity, suffering and a violent past. Food produced

in harmony with nature, and that looked and tasted like nature, was not considered something positive. Many youngsters I talked to believed that someone who directly relied upon nature to eat food had to be poor, because they could not afford to buy food in the supermarket. They had to work on the land and that type of manual labor in the dirt was linked to a lower social status. For instance, store-bought refined mealie meal was affiliated with urbanity and a higher social status than straight-run mealie meal from the miller, because the refined version was, as a participant once described it, "white and clean" (fieldnotes, December 2017). It reflected its production and processing in urban factories. By contrast, straight-run mealie meal was linked more directly to nature, as one could still see particles of the grain husk in the final product.

My conversation with university student Godfrey illuminates this further. In response to my question about his favorite foods, he listed various fast-food chains. So, I asked: "And what about Zimbabwean food?"

Godfrey replied: "Our food culture is not really good, stable, solid. We don't have, we currently don't have ... from my own perspective". I said: 'So ... what about *tsunga ne dovi* (green leafy vegetable with peanut butter) or with *muboora* (pumpkin leaves) ... that's not typical Zimbabwean food?"

Godfrey: "It is typical Zim food, but how did it start? ... Like where my ancestors are from ... we can have *muboora* ... there were circumstances for me to use peanut butter instead of cooking oil. There was no cooking oil. Option B was?... *dovi*. So that's how you can have a meal. It never emerged as a source of pleasure. It emerged due to circumstances: we don't have this and we substitute using B. It's a very obvious thing". (interview with Godfrey, January 2017)

Godfrey wanted to eat food as a source of pleasure, instead of food that was born out of a context where people have had to reconcile and adapt their food choices out of necessity.

Taku, a young adult living in the satellite town, was equally disapproving of Zimbabwean traditional food. He wanted a departure from the type of life his parents had lived, which he equated with traditional foods.

My parents, they grew up eating this ... what do you call it, weird stuff. Let's call it weird stuff, the *dereres* (okra) and the *madora's* (mopane worms) and stuff. I don't see myself eating all that. I don't want to live a life like my parents! I'm looking for the *masalads*, *chi chi* (what what/etcetera), the good stuff. I look for the good stuff that's the thing, like lasagna ... foreign foods. (interview with Taku, February 2017)

Taku's comment reflects a common theme in my interviews with young participants. Negative ideas of traditional food in *kumusha* that their parents glorified went hand in hand with positive imaginaries about the urban realm and its associated lifestyles and social status.

Salad was just one example out of many foodstuffs, such as cornflakes, pork pie and tinned foods, that were a status symbol and represented urbanity, unlike the foods from *kumusha* that were seen as a product of their ancestors' surviving strategies during times of oppression. Tapiwa's answer to my question on the origins of the word *masalad* reveals the connection to status.

I asked Tapiwa if *masalads* eat a lot of salad. While laughing, he explained:

No, they take it (salad) as something special. They are the ones who act like they are top class. Most of them show off. (fieldnotes, December 2017).

Salad signified foreignness and a high status, as cold vegetables as part of a main meal are not regularly consumed in Zimbabwe. Only on special occasions, such as a wedding, funeral and Christmas parties, I saw cold dishes, such as coleslaw and pasta salad made with mayonnaise or salad cream, that can be classified as salad. In addition, salad also represented a certain 'modern' lifestyle and 'healthy' beauty ideals, as seen on television and in popular culture (fieldnotes, December 2017).

A conversation with Richmond, a gardener in his fifties working in Johannesburg, on who exactly *masalads* were reveals the link to urbanity:

It's this new generation now, eh! They like urban lives". In a high-pitched funny voice, while walking in a silly manner and making hand gestures, he said: "They are used to say: I'm going to eat in a restaurant in Borrowdale or Avondale [former white upmarket residential areas]. (interview with Richmond, April 2017)

The spatial associations of urban as a symbol of modernity and foreignness can be linked to urban racialized cultural and social hierarchies instituted during colonialism. The basis of this hierarchy was formed by settlers constructing the city as a white cultured and civilized space where rural Africans were visitors, a discourse that was particularly present when black Zimbabweans made up a migratory workforce (Rakodi 1995; Scarnecchia 2008). Africans came from 'native reserves' in rural areas, which were framed and regulated as inferior places, void of a sophisticated culture and even barbaric (Machingaidze 1991; Seirliis 2004). When black Zimbabweans gained a more permanent urban presence, the racial spatial and environmental ordering also occurred on a citywide scale through urban segregation (Potts 2011).

One of the functions of urban segregation was to create and maintain a hierarchy of tastes. On the one hand, black residential areas, mostly on the outskirts of the city, were framed and regulated as culturally empty resources of labor that served the settlers' industries and lifestyles, even though in reality, these black spaces also had their own vibrant cultural life, as evidenced by political activism, music, dance or sports and food markets and restaurants (Makombe 2013; Yoshikuni 2007). On the other, the city comprised of white spaces, such as the residential neighborhoods of Borrowdale and Avondale, whose inhabitants in 2016/2017 were mostly members of the political black elite. Here, in the eyes of the settlers, civilized and cultured consumption and living took place through, inter alia, the use of Western commodities (Musemwa 2010; Seirliis 2004). Western food, food consumed in white urban spaces and food produced through a white form of agriculture became a marker of cultural supremacy. Consumption in these neighborhoods thus offered a different modern and foreign – *masalad*—type of life.

Older participants disapproved the youngsters' attraction to the *masalads* lifestyle and rejection of their Zimbabwean heritage. They often described *masalads* as "fake", "ignorant" and "running away from their culture", implicating they were less authentic Zimbabwean. Such sentiments stemmed from disappointment. They felt disheartened that the younger generation rejected the food and food culture that was tied to their identity and that they were keen to keep alive by passing on knowledge and practices to the new generation.

These intergenerational negotiations around foodways can be recognized in the following quotes. An elderly Zimbabwean church leader Mr Chinyama said sternly:

I don't think we have to abandon our culture of going to *kumusha*. It's part of Zim culture. Nowadays people are no longer interested, but it's a bad idea that rural food is backward. They need to be educated about food from rural areas. (interview with Mr Chinyama, April 2017)

Maita, a mother in her forties, was more understanding of the position of the younger generation:

My daughter told me the other day that that life in Zimbabwe is finished, a book that is closed. Right now, I want to write a new book, she told me. If she thinks that about life in XXX [similar high-density satellite town], why would she even want to go to *kumusha*?! They face rejection [in Zimbabwe]. They have anger. They want to move out. They look at what their family members abroad are doing. (interview with Maita, February 2017)

Maita's comment is representative of the trend in my data that the younger generation had become disillusioned with the

political establishment and the economic climate, which was brought about by years of authoritarianism and nepotism. The unequal power relations in Zimbabwean society had disadvantaged young adults to the point where they were looking for a departure from the status quo and the past. As food from *kumusha* represented the past, it did not fit within their search for a different future.

It is noteworthy that one participant challenged his peers that were dejectedly disconnected from traditional food heritage and everything that it represented. After studying at culinary school in South Africa and working as a chef, Tawana, at 25 years old, returned to Zimbabwe for family reasons. He dreamt of opening his own restaurant that would combine “Afro-centric and then Euro influences”. While gesturing wildly, he exclaimed: “We need something infused! Creativity! Diversified!”.

He fantasized about the dishes he would serve:

If we're having like *covo*, all organic. I shred it, like paper-thin and then I just steam it, then serve it just like that, no oil, no salt, the whole shebang. We take *mbudzi* [goat] on *gochi gochi* [barbecue]. Now we add a little flavor. We take salt, dried herbs, tomato sauce, Worcester, we make it more interesting. Little sugar and red wine. (...) *matemba* [whitebait] in a side salad! Dried meat, our traditional food, boiled, hydrated made into a sauce, ah ... perfect food. (interview with Chef Tawana, February 2017)

From the rest of the conversation it became clear that he blended both types of foods as a form of art, pleasure and innovation. In creating culturally hybrid dishes, he used food as a lens to look to the future, while simultaneously recognizing the past. He regarded Zimbabwean foodways as fluid, as open to innovation, as long as he had the autonomy to decide how external influences were incorporated into local food.

Even though he was also from the same town as this study was conducted in, it is important to recognize that Tawana's optimistic take on reinventing Zimbabwean food was possible, because of his privilege of a somewhat stable income and educational experience. He was not as desperate and as angry as his unemployed peers who feel stuck in Zimbabwe.

Discussion and conclusion

Historically situated foodways among different social groups have not been sufficiently incorporated in urban food security studies in Zimbabwe and other African countries. Exploring the socio-cultural nature of foodways on interconnected individual and structural scales, this paper examined how participants of three generations give meaning to food and negotiate their foodways in an urban context. Scholars in critical nutrition have critiqued the food security framework

for its disproportionate material focus and therefore lack of acknowledgement of food's inevitable social and cultural nature (Hayes-Conroy et al. 2014; Scrinis 2008; Yates-Doerr 2012). Similarly demonstrating that food is more than a technical and measurable commodity, as food security studies allude to, the findings draw attention to social, cultural and spatial meanings and practices that are central to food relationships in times of economic hardship. Food preferences of urban residents cannot be reduced to a fixed option in a questionnaire, as also argued by Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy (2015).

Studies adopting food sovereignty frameworks have highlighted the need to place food security in the context of structural inequalities in decision-making processes and distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges in the food system and society (Cadieux and Slocum 2015). In understanding the complexity of food security in a postcolonial African setting, this study in Zimbabwe demonstrates why it is important to consider (inter)generational negotiations around tradition and modernity, changing urban–rural connections and socio-ecological relations, the continuing impact of racial, social and spatial hierarchies instituted during colonialism on everyday foodways and contemporary structures of authoritarianism and patronage economies.

For most of the participants of the younger generation, escapism from political and economic marginalisation fueled an attraction to modern foods and rejection of traditional food. Exceptions to this trend in my findings highlight that exposure to, and experiences in, the rural world also play a role, and thus foodways cannot be explained by generation alone. Furthermore, there are indications in my findings, in the form of chef Tawana, that some youngsters integrate traditional and modern foods, creating a new, hybrid foodways.

Yet, why is Tawana an exception among the young participants in terms of reinventing a hybrid Zimbabwean cuisine, when there are various case-studies of urbanites pursuing urban hybrid foodways, integrating modern and traditional foods in other African countries? In line with Elwert-Kretschmer (2001), who argues that culinary integration occurs in different degrees and ways depending on social characteristics such as gender, class and age, my findings suggest that in Zimbabwe, due to the marginalised position of the young generation in high-density neighbourhoods, pursuing hybrid cuisines by choice is not attractive. The disillusion and dejected feelings that appear from my findings are similar to what Jaji (2020) observes in her study on the politically and economically marginalised position of youth in Zimbabwe. She writes that ‘decades of age-based exclusion’ and ‘the older generation's domination and monopolisation of a toxic and restrictive political space (...) has left many young people apathetic, hopeless, and resigned’ (Jaji 2020, pp. 77–78).

For participants of the middle-aged and post-independence generations, my findings suggest that traditional foodways play a key role in (re)affirming their strong experiential connection to *kumusha* and their Zimbabwean identity. The latter was for many participants based on direct experiences of indigenous liberation, which included a strong nationalist rhetoric and belief in indigenous culture and systems, in the decades before and after liberation in 1980 (Mtisi et al. 2009). In addition, the post-independence generation also experienced a stable (though unequal) economic climate in the two decades after independence (Muzondidya 2009). Thus, their political identity rooted in nationalist liberation and stable economic environment might explain why, despite the colonial and postcolonial racialized hierarchical value systems that they experienced, they do not have a predominantly negative relationship with *kumusha* and traditional food, like the younger generation.

Yet, many participants of the post-independence generation also appreciated imported and modern foods, as they were attracted to status foods as a way to escape the everyday violence and marginalization they experienced. These processes of marginalisation were particularly disturbing for them considering the life stage they were in, which is a period in which they are building a family life and a stable and satisfactory (in)formal income.

The different positions towards traditional and modern foods in the findings could raise discussion around the tension between culturally appropriate food and self-determination in the food sovereignty framework. This tension relates to one of food sovereignty's 'thorny questions' that Edelman et al (2014) address. Considering dietary aspirations have been shaped by 'long term trade patterns and corporate branding' (Edelman et al 2014, p. 917), and as I argue in this article by racialized geographies stemming from colonialism, they ask to what extent food sovereignty should challenge non-local and non-agroecological dietary aspirations.

Many of the younger participants preferred processed and imported foods and integrated these into their daily foodways. Thus, when taking seriously their perspective and agency, food that is not traditionally produced and not local would be part of what youth consider their culturally appropriate food, often due to the status appeal of food such as salad, refined maize meal and lasagna. Even though Edelman et al (2014) recognize the impossibility of strictly demarcating what is culturally acceptable and what is not, they argue that food sovereignty should be about 'defending, reinvigorating and rebuilding food cultures' as well as 'enhancing food literacy and modifying consumer tastes' (p. 917). Such a normative stance could go against food sovereignty's principle of self-determination. It raises the question whether there is space within the food sovereignty discourse for hybrid food cultures in which people combine and appropriate different types of foods to

form their own food cultures, which are, in turn, shaped by not only one's generation (as shown in this paper) but also other intersecting factors such as gender and class. To highlight that culturally appropriate food is dynamic and contradictory, food sovereignty could therefore benefit from more studies of everyday foodways among city dwellers in African countries, opening up perspectives beyond the many studies of organized food initiatives and projects that—implicitly or explicitly (Siebert 2020)—align with food sovereignty.

This study also has limitations. First, the role of gender within foodways, the domestic division of labor and urban–rural connections have not been discussed in much depth in this paper. Considering gendered food relationships could have deepened the understanding of how different generations give meaning to food. Second, the focus of this paper has been on the relation between (post-)colonial national political economy and (inter-)generational foodways and not on the role of the global corporate food system. Future research could, in line with nutrition transition scholarship (Hawkes et al. 2009), address the role of corporate globalization in the daily lives of different generational groups in urban Zimbabwe. Third, instead of basing generations on historical periods, future studies on the role of age, generation or life course in foodways and food security, could conceptualize generational categories as a social identity, to recognize the socially constructed nature of generation as well as diverse life trajectories independent of age.

The findings in this paper could inform policy making on urban food security in Zimbabwe, in particular to make policy more targeted towards the needs of different generational social groups. This aligns with Chirimuuta and Gudhlanga's (2016) observation that most policy in the realm of food security in Zimbabwe is not rooted in the communities their interventions are supposed to benefit. Moreover, the findings in this paper could be relevant in understanding whether people are able to have relationships with food that contribute not only to their basic physical needs, but are also in line with 'cultural norms and values and the concept of rebuilding and maintaining family dignity (Mukudoka 2013, p. 8)', one of the main policy goals of the Zimbabwean government's Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2013–2020. Ultimately, through developing a socio-cultural, political and historical understanding of everyday food relationships in the city, this paper can show actors within the (Zimbabwean) food security discourse that generation-specific life experiences and intergenerational negotiations around food can play an important role in foodways and that working towards equitable access to healthy, suitable and enough food should not happen in an apolitical and ahistorical vacuum.

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